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ABSTRACT

Some college administrators have used the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s to make program cuts that they have wanted to make all along for political or personal reasons. The mission statements of universities often are general enough to allow much interpretation and interpolation. If a statement calls for communication skills, administrators may see both written and oral skills as the domain of the English department--a staple in the liberal arts program. Among the hardest hit have been vocational programs like journalism, which at some universities has been either merged with communication departments or eliminated altogether. To combat the negative stigma of journalism programs, there are a number of things that scholars in that field can do. One method that has been successful in many schools has been the hybrid degree program that combines journalism courses, communication courses, and courses from a discipline outside the communication program. The advantages of these merged programs are obvious: first, to open a dialogue between journalism and other disciplines, especially those in the liberal arts; second, to share students with less popular programs like philosophy. Further when programs are actually merged into the same department, administrators should arrange office space and programs so as to encourage intermingling between faculty. Efforts must be made also to fully merge the curriculums. (TB)

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# COMMUNICATING ON DIFFERENT NON-LEVEL PLAYING FIELDS: MIXING JOURNALISM WITH COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND/OR ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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Communicating on Different Non-level Playing Fields: Mixing Journalism with Communication Studies and/or Electronic Media

There seems to be open warfare on journalism programs lately...especially if you are from Arizona. In August of 1992, the President of Northern Arizona University greeted returning faculty to campus with a surprise edict: Because of budget problems, certain programs would have to be cut as part of a "right-sizing" effort. On the top of the cut list was Journalism. In our School of Communication, 9 full time faculty members, including some who were tenured and had 15 years of service to the program were being terminated. Not reassigned, **terminated.** No clear cut reasons were given to explain why some programs were being cut while others were not.

Last year, a faculty committee in the college of Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Arizona voted to eliminate the Journalism program that was in their college. Perhaps Arizona schools are not typical of colleges and universities across the country. But the forces at work at both institutions in my state seem to be present in other states as well.

BUDGET CRISES

Most states experienced budget crises as a result of the recession in the late '80s and early '90s. As this hit the state universities, the question was often "Should we make budget cuts horizontally (everybody suffers equally) or vertically (some programs suffer totally...elimination). Some administrators used

the budget crisis as an opportunity to make the program cuts that they have wanted to make all along for political or personal reasons. (No doubt some were made for bona fide academic reasons, but professors in these unfortunate programs have difficulty seeing it that way.) Cases were made to retain those programs that were central to the mission of the university as defined by the published mission statements. Programs not central to the mission were slated for extinction.

## Mission Statements

The mission statements of universities often are general enough to allow much interpolation and interpretation. The exact meaning of these statements was always in the eye of the beholder. Our university stated in no less than three places that the mission of the university was concerned with strengthening the "written and oral communication skills" of its students. Most of us would think that strengthening written communication skills would involve journalism and journalistic skills...learning about the real world and being able to put that knowledge into written form. But many universities tend to believe that written skills (and sometimes oral skills as well) are the domain of the English department. Discussion about what the mission statements actually meant reminded me of religious programs on television where the televangelists interpreted the Bible in a way that coerced the viewers into sending dollars to his ministry in order to ward off evil. Also like the Bible,

nobody is really sure who wrote the mission statements...even though they are recent proclamations. So it is difficult to ask the authors. Some mission statements are so nebulous that it has been said that mission statement writers should have had some journalism education, so they could be more clear.

The centrality to the mission problem has caused the journalism program at Ohio State, a program with a first rate reputation in the reporting of public affairs, to have its faculty sharply cut and the remaining faculty merged with the communication department. Programs at the University of Southern California and San Diego State are experiencing similar mergers.

Liberal Arts

Some universities used a common sense approach and asked what courses (and therefore, programs) did all or at least most students need and keep those intact. The programs left intact were those directly associated with Liberal Arts, of course. Most institutions of higher learning require two years of Liberal Arts courses. The programs that were strong contributors to the Liberal Arts programs were rated best and those that contributed least were rated worst. Herein lies the problem and an uneven playing field for Journalism. As stated by Peterson (1986) "without teaching the craft, we are simply teaching about journalism" and without exploring the larger nature of journalism, "we are divorcing ourselves from the university itself and...drifting into a narrow vocationalism". This clearly

states the conflict between the desire to adhere to a liberal arts orientation and the demands of the journalism profession that journalism programs must face. This is a conflict that most university programs do not face. Because of this conflict, journalism programs get severely criticized for a lack of scholarship. As stated by Parisi (1992), "In the lexicon of liberal arts scholarship, "journalistic" is a dirty word--a synonym for simplistic ideas and over dramatic language. Journalism education suffers from the stigma of being a narrow, practical training that oversimplifies the very intellectual complexities that disciplines such a literary study, philosophy, sociology, psychology and anthropology seek to explore".

The Stigma of a Professional School

An extension of the" Liberal Arts...good, non-Liberal Arts... bad" logic is the notion that universities tend to mistrust programs that are considered professional. Professional programs train students for the profession, they don't educate them. Students learn only to serve the corporate giants that they will bond with once they graduate. They have no allegiance to the academy. Without the allegiance to the academy, professional schools tend to looked upon as a type of frill for a budget conscious university. In the minds of many central administrators, professional schools like journalism should be funded not by the university, but by the industries that they serve.

The irony here is that most journalism programs have more rigorously focused liberal arts requirements than many liberal arts colleges. Students in accredited programs are required to take three quarters of their course work in other departments of the university.

The playing field is not level when comparing the educational and professional credentials, teaching goals and research and creative output of journalism professors and most of the rest of the college or university. Unfortunately, the field is not level when comparing journalism professors with their new colleagues in speech communication and broadcasting or electronic media. The Ph.D. is almost always the terminal degree for those seeking tenure track jobs in speech communication and the most commonly earned terminal degree in electronic media. The difference in education, equivalent to about three years of graduate work in classes and dissertation work, translates into a mind set difference where the Ph.D.s usually have more respect for the value of "contributing to the body of knowledge" in the field through research publications. In some cases, doctoral students are led to believe that real professors do real research...meaning published research in scholarly journals. For many of us, this type of publishing meant quantitative research, although qualitative research has certainly gained in popularity and respect in the past fifteen years. Unfortunately, journalistic articles or columns are not routinely viewed as being on the same academic level as the more empirically oriented

work. As a result, journalism professors are at a disadvantage when compared with their new communication colleagues. If merit pay is based, at least in part, on research productivity, then journalism professors are often at a disadvantage. But enough of elucidating the non-levelness. There are things that can be done to make the situation better.

## Building Level Bridges

There are a number of things that journalism programs can do to establish better relationships with the rest of the university either before or after it has been blended into a communication studies program. One method that has been successful in many schools has been the hybrid degree program that combines journalism courses, communication courses and courses from a discipline outside of the communication program. There are a number of logical choices that mix well with journalism like political science, environmental science, history, english or economics. These are only the most obvious. Combinations with philosophy and participation in programs designed for pre-law students are appearing. The advantages of these merged majors or major/minor combinations are obvious: first to open a dialogue between journalism and other disciplines, especially those in the liberal arts; and second to share students, both for enrollment enhancement for the less popular disciplines like philosophy and the stimulation provided by students who soon become more knowledgeable in both disciplines. At NAU, journalism students

were traditionally allowed to take 56 or more hours of journalism classes. When this policy was discontinued and a minor in "unrelated" areas was encouraged, it was met with enthusiasm by programs that often had to fight to maintain enrollment.

Another strategy for building bridges that has met with success is to bring in guest speakers that span the interests of journalism and other disciplines. For example, bring in a political columnist to speak to both journalism and political science students, or a columnist who specializes in writing about the economy for journalism and business students. This gets the faculties to communicate about common interests. This strategy also works within the merged communication program as well.

## Suggestions for Administrators of Merged Programs

Zajonc (1968) found that mere exposure of people to one another has beneficial effects between the relationships of people. This is certainly true when mixing faculty from the disciplines of journalism, electronic media and speech communication. As they work together they gain respect for each other's work and each other as professors. When faculty from the different disciplines conduct research or other grant work, the program gains not only by the work produced, but also by the improvement in relationships among the investigators. This type of fusion between faculty members from journalism and speech communication and/or electronic media may need some energy input. It may be appropriate to offer incentive for joint projects of

this nature. Additional in-kind program resources can be added for each proposal. Special credit can be given for evaluation purposes in consideration for raises (at year end evaluation). Extra support can be offered faculty in one disciple to present a paper at a conference that is traditionally attended only by the faculty from one of the other disciplines.

Careful consideration should be made when deciding upon new hires. It may be helpful to the program if job descriptions are written for new faculty who have a main strength in one discipline, but the ability to teach and do some research in another. A new broadcast journalism professor could be hired that can also teach a basic reporting class appropriate for both broadcast and journalism students. A journalism professor might be able to teach a communication law class that would serve the needs of both electronic and print media students.

Another consideration for new faculty is where their offices should be located. Many merged programs still have segregated office spaces--the speech people tend to have offices in one area, journalism in another area and electrcnic media in still another. This may be necessary to allow faculty to be near the lab space they use in classes. If possible, place new faculty in a way that allows them to interact easily with faculty from the other areas of the program.

A cautionary note is appropriate here. When discipline areas are blurred by hiring new faculty with several areas of interest, faculty office assignments are rearranged to mingle

faculty from different areas and faculty are strongly encouraged to bring forth joint grant proposals some reactionary opinions might surface. You could be accused of trying to divide and conquer. There is no simple answer to these accusations. In most cases, the merger was a result of a central administration that sent a message similar to what some people at the University of Arizona were told..."Consolidate or die". You could remind faculty that a unified program is the goal, not a loose confederation of disciplines.

Sharing Resources

The sharing of resources is a good way to level the playing fields after a merger has taken place. Before a program merger, separate departments often have resources, facilities, and/or space that becomes part of the new conglomerate. The use of these resources can be viewed as gauge for how well the merger works. If resources are shared, the merger will be healthier from the beginning. If the merged programs have the attitude that they must protect what has been theirs since they were a stand alone department, the true blending of the programs into a comprehensive communication studies program will take much longer than necessary.

Standing on Ceremony

Typically, programs that have been independent have developed traditions over the years that include honors recognition, scholarship awards and student competitions. Even

these things can be combined and thereby become unifying events. Perhaps the most important of these is the graduation ceremony. If a tradition of separate ceremonies has been in place, a graduation ceremony for all of the combined programs yields a feeling of family among the students and faculty. A special note here should be made about the sanctity of departmental scholarship money. In a merger involving journalism, electronic media and speech communication, the journalism program will usually have far more scholarships than either of the other two programs, due to the generosity of foundations like those of Knight-Ridder, Gannett, Scripps Newspapers and other old line journalism entities. Mingling scholarship dollars from journalism with those from the other programs can easily cause intensely bad feelings from journalism faculty and the donors themselves. Print entities rarely feel comfortable making donations to support students who are headed for a career in a competing field like broadcast journalism. The best plan for action is to keep the scholarships separate unless a special situation allows flexibility for the awarding the scholarship and the approval of both faculty and donors.

Curricular Strategies

Merged programs are not really merged unless there is some cross fertilization among the curricula from the participants. When planning for the merger of our departments of journalism, speech communication and broadcasting to form a School of

Communication, courses were sought that could serve in the major programs of students from more than one discipline area. Instead of finding isolated courses at varying parts of the curriculum, it was decided that all School of Communication majors should take a core of classes that included important basic aspects of the three areas. Two considerations were important: first what was to be the exact content of each of the core classes and second, which area would be required to staff each class. In our School we chose to have an Introduction to Communication class that has been taught by faculty from all areas, including one year when it was team taught by five faculty who represented all School programs with coordination by the Director of the program. In addition, there is a basic writing class staffed primarily by journalism faculty, a basic oral communication class staffed primarily by the speech communication faculty and a communication theory class that is usually staffed by speech communication, but has been taught by faculty from other areas.

Looking to the Future

Communication studies programs that encompass journalism, broadcasting/electronic media and speech communication should look for the aspects of their programs that they have in common. The obvious aspects are those that involve messages: message design, message construction, message transmission, message reception and the evaluation of message effectiveness. In addition, professors in these areas should look closely as the information revolution progresses. The information highway and

the digitalization of information offers our field many opportunities for scholarly endeavor from all communication perspectives. We should try to avoid letting the distractions created by university politics and budgetary convenience cause too much of our time and effort to be wasted.

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